

Higher education leaders urged to rethink change management strategy for private faculty offices in 2026, new Higher Education seminar reveals

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As universities continue to seek new cost-cutting opportunities and greater efficiency, attendees at a Q4 virtual Higher Education seminar last week called for higher education leaders to start 2026 by rethinking their change management strategy for transitioning away from private faculty offices.

Hosted by workplace solutions provider HubStar, the online event was attended by campus planning leaders along with facilities management (FM) professionals who specialise in managing campus buildings.

The discussions found that many Higher Education (HE) institutions are now making better use of underutilized campus spaces by creating more student collaboration areas and tailored workspaces to attract study-from-home students back onto the campus. But the controversial issue of shared faculty office spaces is hampering further cost-savings.

A poll held during the discussions revealed that 37% of the institutions represented at the virtual seminar currently have a mix of private faculty offices and shared flexible spaces. However, the survey found that few HE institutions have a consistent approach to moving from private to shared faculty office spaces.

Attendees heard how academics are resisting the introduction of shared faculty offices. It is a highly contentious issue which is viewed as challenging universities' long-standing traditions of privacy, autonomy and academic identity. Faculty argue that shared or hot-desk arrangements will undermine their

sense of academic independence. They also see shared offices as part of a corporate-style ‘efficiency’ model that clashes with academic culture.

Attendees at the virtual seminar called for a greater focus on using the latest workplace technology—including sensors and Wi-Fi signals—to gather accurate usage data for private faculty offices. They believe this may provide the evidence needed to justify a shift from private to shared faculty spaces.

The discussions revealed how one recent study using occupancy sensors found that an entire 20,000 square foot floor of faculty offices was rarely used—yet faculty leaders were requesting *more* space. The data showed utilization was struggling to reach double digits.

Some attendees disclosed that, on their campuses, faculty were often only in the building three days a week and most of that time was not spent in their private offices. In some cases, they were only in their office about two hours a week.

With many faculty members opposing the introduction of shared office spaces, Chris Morett, President at ColHere Campus and Workplace—a consultancy specializing in campus space planning—observed: “This isn’t just about wasted space; it’s about whether they’re in the best space possible for the activity they’re doing.”

Morett added: “Shared faculty offices are absolutely not a non-starter. My personal preference is to find the most likely people to be naysayers and include them from the beginning.” He cited the example of the University of Colorado Anschutz campus which created a Faculty Club with amenities like dry cleaning services for faculty who gave up private offices.

Joe Harris, HubStar’s Director of Business Development, said: “In our experience, the best solution is a phased, data-driven transition that balances efficiency with faculty trust. You have to start small with a pilot scheme that designs spaces around privacy and collaboration.”

Harris highlighted an example from HubStar customer Sheffield Hallam University. The university’s space management team initially deployed HubStar sensors in the Vice Chancellor’s offices. This proved faculty could share spaces effectively and the findings were then used as a benchmark to sell the broader vision.